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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ASHGABAT 000482

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN/EU TROIKA-CENTRAL ASIA: BEHIND THE
SCENES

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0472

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0388

[1](#)C. ASHGABAT 0375

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Briefing on the April 9-10 EU
Troika-Central Asia Ministerial in Ashgabat, French
Ambassador Christian Lechervy (strictly protect throughout)

-- lamented the region's lack of cohesion and common
interests, as well as Kazakhstan's "arrogance";

-- criticized EU Commissioner for External Affairs and
European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner for
grandstanding;

-- affirmed President Berdimuhamedov had promised at least 10
bcm/y of natural gas for Europe, although Europe would be
responsible for getting it to Europe from Turkmenistan's
border;

-- alleged Russian mischief-making had postponed signing of
the EU-Turkmenistan Energy MOU; and

-- reported French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner had
pressed Berdimuhamedov on Iranian proliferation, the relation
of economic reform to energy development, and human rights.
END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) On April 16, French Ambassador Christian Lechervy
(strictly protect throughout), just back from a brief visit
to Paris, provided Charge a 90-minute read-out of the April

9-10 EU Troika-Central Asia Ministerial as well as the April 11 French Foreign Minister Kouchner bilateral with President Berdimuhamedov. Lechervy's substantive read-out tracked closely with reftel A that was based on EC internal documents and media sources. Of more interest were his comments about personalities, policies, and behind-the-scenes attitudes and maneuverings.

REGIONAL APPROACH? NYET!

¶3. (C) Lechervy animatedly declared, "They (the Central Asians) don't understand the EU and how we work, and they refuse to coordinate among themselves." During the Ministerial, April 9 was set aside for bilateral meetings, and April 10 was the plenary for assigned countries' presentations on specific issues (e.g., education, rule of law, economy and trade, water) that should be common to each country, and thus to the region. Lechervy said it was clear there had been no intra-Central Asian coordination in advance, because each country reporting on its assigned issue presented it from that country's experience and viewpoint. Lechervy also noted during the advance planning, the EU had requested a meeting with President Berdimuhamedov for all five countries' foreign ministers. The Turkmen Foreign Ministry refused to say "no"; it simply ignored the request.

¶4. (C) In lamenting Central Asia's lack of a spirit of regionalism, Lechervy said Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were most clear in expressing their distaste for regional approaches, but he singled out Kazakhstan for special criticism. He characterized the bilateral meeting with Kazakh Foreign Minister Tazhin as "astonishing." Lechervy

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alleged that Tazhin launched into an "extraordinarily arrogant tirade," demanding to know why the EU pretends to treat all five countries as equals when it's clear Kazakhstan is globally head and shoulders above the rest. Tazhin reportedly asked forcefully why the EU "dumps its resources down the 'black holes' of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, when it's clear only Kazakhstan knows how to use those resources responsibly." He allegedly added, "This is a question of face for me and my president."

ENERGY: WHO DIED AND MADE BENITA GOD?

¶5. (C) Inadvertently revealing that the EU, too, is not all that good at regional coordination and cooperation, Lechervy said there had been four separate meetings with President Berdimuhamedov: one each for EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel, EC Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner. Current EU presidency representative Slovene Foreign Minister Dmitriy Rupel, and incoming EU presidency representative French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.

¶6. (C) Lechervy was less than complementary about Ferrero-Waldner, commenting all had been "furious" that immediately after her meeting with Berdimuhamedov, without consulting any of her colleagues, she started working the phones back to journalists in Vienna, including to the Interfax bureau, to crow that she had gotten Turkmenistan to "guarantee a minimum of 10 bcm/y natural gas for Europe." Lechervy judged this was an unnecessary provocation of Russia.

¶7. (C) During her meeting with Berdimuhamedov, she reportedly strongly emphasized the Nabucco Pipeline. As he had done in Ankara (ref B), he questioned her closely, "Who supports it?" Non-plussed, she replied, "Obviously the EU." He persisted, "Who else?" She added, "The United States." Berdimuhamedov then commented, "I thought so."

¶8. (C) In Lechervy's unvarnished comments, he stated that Ferrero-Waldner's "aggressive arrogance" is wearing thin and described her as a "loose cannon" who increasingly

"infuriates" her colleagues. He alleged she's battling EC Energy Special Envoy Andreas Piebalgs for control of EC energy policy. Lechervy sniffed, "She seems to speak more for Austria and OMV than for the Commission."

GAS FOR EUROPE

¶9. (C) Lechervy said each of the four EU visitors asked Berdimuhamedov about gas for Europe, and to each he replied 10 bcm/y could be available initially -- and reminded them Turkmenistan sells its gas at its border. Each asked which border. Three times he replied "littoral"; one time he said "maritime." Lechervy commented that an EU delegation solely on Nabucco needs to meet with Berdimuhamedov soon "because he simply doesn't get the private-sector aspect; he keeps telling us Europe has to build it."

EU-TURKMENISTAN ENERGY MOU: THE "RUSSIAN DRAFT"

¶10. (C) Lechervy confirmed that it had been impossible to sign the EU-Turkmenistan Energy MOU that had been carefully negotiated over many months. It was only at the beginning of April, slightly over a week before the Ministerial, after all

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27 EU members had approved the language, that Turkmenistan unexpectedly returned the draft with a significant number of substantive changes.

¶11. (S) When asked why he thought this had happened, Lechervy said bluntly, "It's now the Russian draft," and elaborated that the phraseology was "suspiciously Russian." When questioned more closely, he said the process remains opaque, but he's convinced all Turkmen documents for external affairs are vetted in Moscow. When pressed if this is Turkmen government policy, Lechervy replied, "Not necessarily, but the end result is the same." In reply to the question, "How does it work?" he suggested the Russians are on a roll in a number of ministries, not the least the Foreign Ministry, and other government elements. "And it doesn't even cost much," he added. "All they have to do is promise a full scholarship for the official's son." When asked, "Why does the top agree?" Lechervy shrugged, "There must be an understanding" (ref C). (COMMENT: We think there's a degree of exaggeration here, although we do not entirely dismiss the gist. END COMMENT.)

THE KOUCHNER BILAT

¶12. (C) ENERGY AND IRAN (AND TURKEY): During the meeting with Foreign Minister Kouchner, President Berdimuhamedov reportedly said Turkmenistan is ready in principle to send 30 bcm/y natural gas to Turkey via Iran, but Turkey and Iran first have to solve their own problems. He added that Turkish officials had pressed him hard on this during his recent visit to Ankara. When Kouchner asked explicitly if Turkmenistan could send the same amount across the Caspian to Azerbaijan for onward transmission, Berdimuhamedov reportedly replied, "It's possible, but how to do it is strictly a personal matter between (Azerbaijan's President) Aliyev and me." He refused to elaborate.

¶13. (S) PROLIFERATION AND IRAN: Further on Iran, Lechervy said Kouchner raised "hard issues" with Berdimuhamedov, including nuclear proliferation. Kouchner reportedly told Berdimuhamedov France cannot trust Iran and its interlocutors, not just on proliferation but also on a range of other issues including Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Hezbollah. Returning to proliferation, Kouchner reportedly told Berdimuhamedov France and its partners have concrete intelligence on Iran's nuclear program. He exhorted, "Don't dismiss this!" Berdimuhamedov reportedly reverted to asserting Turkmenistan's disinterested neutrality.

¶14. (C) ENERGY AND ECONOMIC REFORM: Linking energy issues and economic reform, Kouchner reportedly pressed

Berdimuhamedov to allow Western energy majors to work onshore and then said for that to happen, Turkmenistan (1) needs a serious and transparent audit of the country's entire energy resources or else there can never be long-term Western partnerships, (2) needs to create an international-standard investment climate that welcomes Western corporations rather than treats them as potential threats and their employees as spies, and (3) needs to complete reform of its fiscal and monetary policies.

¶15. (C) HUMAN RIGHTS: In delivering President Sarkozy's invitation to Berdimuhamedov for an official visit to Paris before the end of this year, Kouchner reportedly stressed four specific human rights cases. Lechervy characterized

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them as not quite "must-do" but rather more than "nice-to-do."
HOAGLAND